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EAST TIMOR: A 'WESTERN MADE TRAGEDY'

presented by Danilo Henriques
East Timorese youth ambassador
tour of North America, April 1993

I speak with you today as one human being to another, at a time of great need for my people, the East Timorese. For the past seventeen years, my people have been the victims of war and atrocities perpetrated by the Indonesian military with the active support of past US administrations. Yet most North Americans have never even heard of East Timor, the eastern half of the island of Timor just north of Australia.

The Portuguese invaded East Timor in the sixteenth century, in the same period Europeans began colonizing the Americas. They introduced Christianity and traded the sandalwood and other natural resources of my country. Some time later the Dutch also arrived. Timor was formally divided between the two colonizing powers with a Treaty signed at the beginning of the twentieth century. When Indonesia won its independence from Holland, the western half of the island became part of the Republic of Indonesia; the eastern half however remained a Portuguese colony. Under international law, Portugal is still the administering power of East Timor.

The hundreds of years of Portuguese colonialism shaped a national identity in East Timor quite different from that in neighboring Indonesia. The impact of Portugal is mapped in the lives of almost every East Timorese. My father's name, for example, is Abilio de Jesu do Rosario Afonso Henriques - a very Portuguese and very Roman Catholic name. My mother is Maria Natercia Correia de Lemos. Her grandfather had been a Lieutenant in the Portuguese army but was exiled to East Timor. Many East Timorese have both a Portuguese and an indigenous Timorese heritage.

In 1942, East Timor was invaded a second time. By both Australia and Japan. The mountains of East Timor had become a World War II battle ground and our capital city, Dili, was bombed to the ground. An estimated 40,000 of my people were killed because they supported the Australians rather than the Japanese. My mother's father died while being treated by Japanese doctors during this occupation of East Timor.

When I was four years old, my country was invaded a third time. This time not 40,000 but an estimated 200,000 of my people died. One third of the pre-1975 population.

The prelude to this invasion took place in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal. In April 1974, the Portuguese people overthrew the fascist regime that had ruled their country for fifty years. One of the new government's first priorities was to decolonize its overseas

territories. In far off Timor, indigenous political parties emerged and my people prepared for independence, democratic elections and an orderly hand over of power. But that orderly hand over never took place. In October 1974, Indonesia launched its Operasi Komodo to destabilize East Timor's decolonization process and integrate the Portuguese territory into Indonesia.

The East Timorese response was to unilaterally proclaim a hasty independence. On November 28 1975 the Republic of East Timor was born with the words:

> *Expressing the highest aspirations of the people of East Timor and to safeguard the most legitimate interests of national sovereignty, the Central Committee of Fretilin decrees by proclamation, unilaterally, the independence of East Timor from 0.00 hours today, declaring the state of the Democratic Republic of East Timor, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist.*

Just as an aside, I'm reminded of your own Declaration of Independence two hundred years earlier, and of those now famous words expressed in Philadelphia in 1776 at a time when people in the US were fighting British colonialism:

> *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...*

But Dili in 1975 was not Philadelphia in 1776. Our Republic was never recognized internationally and our freedom lasted only a few days. For on December 7, 1975, our big neighbor and your ally, Indonesia, invaded us. The next morning, Alarico Fernandes, East Timor's new Information Minister, transmitted the following message:

> *... Indonesian Forces have been landed in Dili by sea... They are flying over Dili dropping paratroopers... A lot of people have been killed indiscriminately... Women and children are going to be killed by Indonesian forces... We are going to be killed... SOS... We call for your help... This is an urgent call.*

The genocide had begun.

I regret to have to tell you that many of the weapons used to kill and maim my people came from the United States. And while the people of the United States may not have known about the invasion, your leaders did. The day before the Indonesians landed, President Gerald Ford and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, were in Jakarta. At the CIA's request, the invasion had been delayed until after they left so the President wouldn't be embarrassed by it.

The United States had long been involved in the politics of the Southeast Asian region. In the 1950's your country worked to undermine the nationalism of Indonesia's President Sukarno. In 1965 it helped put General Suharto into power and supported the mass slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Indonesian communists and their allies. By the early 1970s Indonesia was a major recipient of US military aid.

And then there was the Wetar Strait, a channel of deep water directly north of Timor. This strait was the only possible direct passage of American naval submarines from the Pacific to the Indian Oceans and so of great strategic importance to the United States - especially

while the US was fighting wars just north of Timor in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Washington could tolerate no threat to US access to those waters - and an independent East Timor was perceived as such a threat. So once again, American strategic interests were put above the interests of my people. US weapons, US helicopters and US logistical support were used to put us down.

The US also used its influence in the United Nations to ensure that no action was taken on the many resolutions condemning the Indonesian invasion. One cannot help comparing the US response to the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia with its response to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq.

Despite the pain of the last 17 years, we East Timorese have never accepted defeat. We have a well organized resistance movement and the young people especially, are determined to continue the struggle for our right to self-determination. We acknowledge however, that we are unlikely to win this battle militarily, and we will never win it alone. We need the world to know about what is happening in our country, and we need the world to help.

Since Indonesia re-opened East Timor to foreigners in 1989, the clandestine resistance movement within East Timor has taken every opportunity to demonstrate its opposition to Indonesian occupation. The most recent example of this was the peaceful demonstration at Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili which preceded the massacre there on November 12, 1991.

Soon after that massacre, the Washington Post ran an editorial about American policies towards East Timor. It accused the Ford administration of ignoring the genocide in East Timor for fear of 'complicating relations with its sturdy anti-Communist ally in Jakarta.' The editorial urged the US administration to 'dust off the question of East Timor' in this new post-Cold War climate and to intervene on the side of justice for the East Timorese people.

A few weeks after this editorial was published, one of the men who served with the Central Intelligence Agency in Jakarta in the 1970s, Philip Liechty, reminded us that the events in my country over the last 17 years had been 'a western made tragedy'.

But even with western support, Indonesia has failed to completely subjugate the East Timorese people. Even with between 40,000 and 15,000 Indonesian troops still 'maintaining order' in our tiny country. Even with Indonesia's seventeen year old policy of arbitrary arrests, torture, disappearances, rape, enforced birth control, extra-judicial executions and general intimidation. After seventeen years, we are still fighting – for our right to self-determination, and for the inalienable rights of ' life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' which are so much part of what people in the United States aspire to.

For seventeen years, the United States has been a significant part of the problem in East Timor. We East Timorese are now here to urge the American people and your representatives in Washington to be part of the solution.

Please stop exporting weapons and other military equipment to Indonesia. And please halt economic aid to Indonesia until that country
• permits unrestricted access to East Timor by international human rights organizations;

• ends all forms of inhuman treatment including torture, extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment;
• withdraws its military forces from East Timor; and
• releases all political prisoners including captured resistance leader Xanana Gusmao;

We also ask the Clinton administration to use its influence in the United Nations to:
• ensure that the East Timorese are represented in all UN sponsored talks between Indonesia and Portugal about the future of our country; and to
• facilitate a referendum in East Timor to enable we the East Timorese people to determine our own political destiny.

Please let us too, in our own way, enjoy the rights of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'

Danilo Henriques is one of five East Timorese who visited North America in April 1993 to talk about the future of their occupied country. Their speaking tour was initiated by the East Timorese community in Melbourne, Australia, with the support of the East Timor Talks Campaign. It was hosted and coordinated in North America by the East Timor Action Network USA and East Timor Alert Network Canada.

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